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Remarks
On the Pathology
and Treatment
of
Anasarca.
by
William S. Helmuth.

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By the term Dropsy is meant an accumulation of Serous fluid in one or more of the cavities of the body. - Different names have been given, according to the situation, in which this fluid may be lodged; thus when it is confined to the Abdomen, it is called ascites; when to the Thorax, Hydrothorax; when to the cellular tissue, Anasarca; when to the eye, Hydropthalmy; and so on of the other varieties, they also taking their names from two Greek words, one of which signifies water, and the other the name of the part into which the water is effused;

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or else from supposed resemblances of the swellings to certain objects.

It is a disease of an hereditary nature and the predisposition to it, is found in the Phlegmatic Temperament: The knowledge of its hereditary character was known to the antients, as many of the older writers speak of the fact, and Hippocrates says, that persons predisposed to Dropsy, have blue eyes and are bald.

This affection may be induced by various causes; by a feebleness of constitution brought on by a poor diet; exposure to a damp atmosphere; depressing passions; the inveterate use of ardent drinks, this habit alone has been thought sufficient by some Physicians to occasion a true Dropsy; by impure air; long continued evacuations, frequent salivations; great losses of blood,

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Scarlatina; the abuse of Mercury, drinking when heated cold liquors; cold externally applied to the body while warm; rupture of the Lymphatics; interruptions to the free passage of the blood, either from Tumours, Abscesses & Aneurisms of the Arteries, Schirrus of the Liver, Pancreas and other glands; inflammed Limbs; unsoundness of the Digestive organs; it also follows an attack of Intermittent Fever, and Broussais has inserted among his propositions of Medicine that "Dropsy sometimes occurs at the first attack of Intermittent Fevers but ordinarily is the result of their long continuance only": And in a word Dr Macbride says "every thing therefore which can weaken the absorbent power of the Lymphatics or which occasions a preternatural secretion or oozing of lymph may be considered as a remote or possible cause of

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Dropsy.

Of the Proximate Cause.

This appears to be involved in much obscurity. When the system is in a healthy condition an equilibrium is maintained by the exhalent and absorbent systems of vessels; but disease may destroy this balance and the result will necessarily be, a accumulations of fluid in those parts where such inequality prevails. It has been a question much agitated among Medical men, whether Dropsy was to be attributed to an increased secretion from the exhalents, or whether the powers of the absorbents were lessened, or whether both these circumstances conjoined produced the disease. Sydenham says that the two sources of Dropsy are an increased effusion or diminished absorption of fluids, which may with propriety be reduced to

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the last, for whether there be a defect in the
inhaling powers of the absorbent system,
or too great an effusion from the exhaling
vessels the result of either is the same,
a tendency to lymphatic effusion ensues
[illegible] the cause. — The impoverished con-
dition of the blood has been thought to give
a tendency to serous effusions, and it has
been said that this condition may be produced
by the taking in a large quantity of food
which may also be attributed to a
poor circulation because [illegible] only the
thin, watery portions of food are taken
to the blood vessels. The [illegible]
[illegible] allows to be correct, the weakness of
[illegible] is not owing as he imagined to the
drinking of much water but is a consequence
of the powers of secretion and assimilation being impaired, and consequently

[illegible] the proper proportions
[illegible] and [illegible] health.
Cullen also supposed that there may be a
[illegible] of the exhalent vessels; which opinion
he thinks receives strength from the fact
of [illegible] to fluids in which [illegible]
is [illegible] and [illegible] frequently [illegible]
with [illegible] well and, and also from
the [illegible] that dropsy is most [illegible]
in [illegible] of [illegible] debility in which [illegible]
[illegible] the [illegible] vessels. He also
thinks that a principal cause of the symptom
is a decreased absorption for he remarks
"It seems probable that absorption may be
diminished and cease altogether from a
loss of tone in the [illegible] extremities of
the lymphatics, [illegible] cannot [illegible] and
[illegible] space, bone or [illegible] power is
necessary to [illegible] [illegible]

appears probable, that the same general activity, which produces that happy state of the atmosphere which allows us to expect the approaching diathesis to cease, will at the same time occasion a change in the elements, so as to produce that a change of the constituents may be gradually accomplished by a step or two in the [illegible], and that this will have a share in the production of [illegible] and it is probable that the connection of phosphorus has a considerable share in the matter, as [illegible] are often concerning [illegible] which seem to be made to precede the crisis of the disease."

The fact of the [illegible] in dropsical bodies being found much enlarged and thickened might also be considered as [illegible] to the supposition of

diminished absorption. Absorption may also be deferred in consequence of the exhalents secreting a vitiated fluid and therefore obnoxious to the lymphatics. Dr. [illegible] says "that the functions of the absorbent system of vessels are variously affected in different cases of Dropsy seems very probable, since they are restored when the disease is cured by medicines possessing apparently different and opposite effects" — A paralysis of the absorbents has also been assigned as a cause, but if this were correct relief could not be so speedily and frequently afforded as it is. If this cause does exist it is most probably in those cases which are found to be beyond the reach of medicine — Dropsy has been imagined by some to arise in consequence of an inability of the kidneys but this is at once contradicted by a knowledge of the fact that persons

* It is mentioned and found in his diary of [illegible], that he also gives an account of a case of dropsy in which the liver attained the enormous weight of [illegible] hundred and [illegible] pounds, and that Bartholine reports [illegible] in which it reached to [illegible] and [illegible] pounds and Bonnet a case in which its weight amounted to [illegible] pounds —

[illegible] to make [illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible].

"In state of the liver [illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] made [illegible] in
the [illegible] of diseases [illegible] that an enlarge-
ment of the liver [illegible] was alone considered
to excite the disease [illegible] at least frequent cause;*
but that the complaint is to be changed to a
[illegible] state of the [illegible], and [illegible] this
[illegible] to me to be the [illegible] of
much importance. For it is a fact [illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] from the [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] to have [illegible]
[illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
"When the function of the liver is so perver-
ted by whatever cause that [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] to be [illegible] to the blood, the urinary
secretion and [illegible] absorption [illegible]

[illegible] be more or less diminished and there is a corresponding tendency to [illegible] inasmuch that if there be a general [illegible] to the [illegible] in its frequent [illegible] we have [illegible] before [illegible] or other enlargement, difficult [illegible] or [illegible] the return of the venous blood will have yet occurred. Though healthy, yet be an active blood to the bowels, yet when [illegible] from its [illegible] channel [illegible] the [illegible] it, moves the reverse to other organs."

"In announce a general topic and [illegible] prevent the bodily and mental faculties and if in consequence of previous morbid action of the liver the bile should be vitiated in its properties these effects will be still more remarkable. Hence any material derangement of this organ, especially if accompanied with a languid action of its vessels

and absorption of bile and be produced by the common causes of Dropsy, will be succeeded by a corresponding inactivity of the kidnies and absorbent vessels; and if these causes be not removed and a power of medicine and regimen submitted to, either chronic inflammation, serious enlargement of the liver or both will be the consequence" —

The opinions of the Medical World in more recent times have undergone an entire change with regard to the nature of this affection and instead of considering it as it was formerly supposed to be, a disease of debility, most physicians are now convinced that it is often of an inflammatory description, and some even go so far as to maintain it to be always of the latter character; the mean between these two extremes will be found to approach nearest the truth,

the most

for the most correct view of the subject is certainly to consider the dense cumulus as one of low at other times one of high altitude.

subject, a

in force

[illegible] upon this subject, in the first of which he was led to [illegible] from the results of some experiments [illegible]

The

[illegible]

— Upon blood.

The manner in which a strong mind controls appears at first by a soft and [illegible] smile of the countenance upon the force used to the moment [illegible] but [illegible] itself in the next hour an open appearance [illegible] extends up the legs and thus [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] force applied but when the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] membrane of the

lungs is involved in the complaint cough and difficulty of breathing then ensue. The appearance of the urine varies. the bowels become costive, thirst very great, emaciation and fever supervened. The symptoms not enumerated are those which belong to anasarca it will be however unnecessary to give them. the disease [illegible] runs on very rapidly, which is the case particularly, when it follows an attack of Scarlatina—

Prognosis.

If the Dropsy succeeds to [illegible] the liver is indurated [illegible] [illegible] a [illegible] treatment, yet there [illegible] [illegible] the prognosis — [illegible]

[illegible] state may be considered as a favorable sign, the [illegible] acute diseases are always dangerous. If the [illegible] much the more difficulty may be anticipated in supposing relief; and if formed slowly

[illegible]

[illegible] [illegible] — [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] —

Of the Treatment.

I shall next give the outline of the plan to be pursued in the treatment of this disease, and it appears to me that in its management considerable judgment and indecision are generally experienced and that remedies are given in a man[illegible] [illegible] may lead to Embarrassing, in part from what I have myself seen of this disease I have determined [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] to assent to the opinion of the ancients that it is one of those diseases which defies the bounds of [illegible] [illegible] ence.

The indications of cure are two. first to expel the accumulation of [illegible],

and necessary to keep the pulse so [illegible]
[illegible] to prevent [illegible] of [illegible] the
remedies employed [illegible] accompanying
of the [illegible] and consist of [illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible]
noted Hydrogen [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] and there [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
the [illegible] constantly varying as it does
increase [illegible] [illegible] of the [illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] of the [illegible] coagu
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
and [illegible] other means [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
to [illegible] action, if on the contrary the pulse
[illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
emaciation and debility we should be
[illegible] the necessity of [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] of treatment, [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] the strength.

[illegible] the combination of letters
[illegible] to [illegible] a letter
[illegible] to [illegible]. If there is [illegible]
[illegible] to [illegible] a letter [illegible] the
[illegible] the [illegible] of the letter [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] under the amount of the [illegible] those days that [illegible] is carried by the [illegible] to the [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

salts into which the mineral [illegible]

[illegible]

of the more [illegible] of them are [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] [illegible] and [illegible] [illegible]
applied to the surface of [illegible] [illegible].

In the administration of [illegible] these cautions are to be observed. We must be particular in the [illegible] [illegible] whether [illegible] [illegible] it may be well suited to the case. The [illegible] of Digitalis must [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] time the temperature of the [illegible] must be kept in with a view of preventing [illegible]. The Pulse must be kept below the natural standard but during the action of a diuretic we must avoid depletion. When the Patient [illegible] attended on the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] to be freely administered. The Diuretics most generally used are the [illegible] and Carbonas Potassa, the Digitalis Purpurea, [illegible] [illegible], [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible].

[illegible] to be the [illegible] symptoms which point out the use of either of these or explained with so much nicety by our greatly esteemed Professor of the Practice in his able work on Therapeutics that the already smaller dose of this injury must challenge for any reference to his book for the most remarkable impressions on the subject.

With a view of carrying off the water Purgative Medicines are much employed, the drastic ones as being most stimulating are in most instances selected; in some cases [illegible] to be [illegible] by the [illegible] of [illegible] or [illegible] to the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

have also been applied; the same remarks apply to them as to Punctures.

I have now concluded what I had to say on the subject of Dropsy, my remarks are more extended, than I contemplated when the Essay was first commenced; it could not however have been well compressed into a smaller space and to have lengthened it would perhaps have been unnecessary. That it is imperfect and contains nothing which is either very new or original, I am well aware, all I believe however which can be expected in works of this description is to consult the best authorities upon the subject and give their Ideas with such occasional remarks of our own as the subject may suggest; this I have in some measure accom-

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plished and must finish with the hope that the whole production will be received with that lenity and forbearance which constitute a part of the characters of my much respected and exalted Instructors the present Professors of the University of Pennsylvania —

October. 16th 1823 —

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